

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 302 485

SO 019 587

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TITLE Effective Teaching of Anthropology: The Feature Film as an Alternative to the Lecture Format.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (80th, Los Angeles, CA, December 2-6, 1981).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Anthropology; Cultural Images; *Curriculum Enrichment; *Ethnography; *Films; Higher Education; Instructional Films; Introductory Courses; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Procedural Justice

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the incorporation of feature films into an introductory anthropology course for college undergraduates. The films are used to reinforce anthropological concepts and theories learned from the assigned readings and the lectures. Anthropology of law is used to illustrate this teaching strategy. Suggested feature films to express substantive and procedural law in various cultures include "The Wedding of Paolo" (Eskimo), "The Ox-Bow Incident", "Citizen Kane" (United States), and "Rashomon" (Japanese). Each story line is described, and its anthropological value is stressed. Documentaries about the culture may also be shown. The appendices contain a list of six basic prerequisites for a society and the cultural background to "The Wedding of Paolo." (DJC)

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EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF ANTHROPOLOGY
THE FEATURE FILM AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE LECTURE FORMAT

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a number of innovations have taken place in the teaching of anthropology and of other subjects in the social sciences and liberal arts. One such innovation is the use of feature films in the classroom.

This method of instruction is of interest to anthropology for a number of reasons. First of all, cultural anthropology, as well as having a scientific aspect, is related to the humanities, in several ways. The intuitive insights of the artist can capture the spirit of a culture, of a national character. A novelist can ask such questions as, "Is there such a thing as a French smile?" The well known brothers William and Henry James are described as a psychologist who writes like a novelist and a novelist who writes like a psychologist, respectively. Those novels depicted national character. Furthermore, the studies of culture at a distance, led by Margaret Mead, Martha Wolfenstein, and others, relied on the feature film as well as on other media to increase the understanding of cultures that it was not always possible to visit.

With such a frame of reference, it was decided that a course on ethnology through film would be presented as an experiment at San Diego State University. Based on the assumption that, at least at times, "a picture is worth a thousand words," I assembled a course that combined lecture, discussion, documentary and ethnographic films, and feature films. It has now been taught three times and has proved invaluable in communicating the concepts of anthropology to many students who had never studied it before, students with a variety of major fields; in addition, those students who were majoring in anthropology found it to be a useful reinforcement.

FORMAT OF THE COURSE

The course begins with a general lecture on the nature of anthropology. Although some of the required reading is somewhat variable, depending on the films to be shown, it usually includes: Agar's Ethnography and Cognition; Aberle and others' article on "Prerequisites," and Mead and Wolfenstein's Childhood in Contemporary Cultures. Each of these sources gives the students a base or a common denominator with which to view and to discuss the films seen in class. In addition, a basic text in anthropology--I use Hoebel and Frost's Cultural and Social Anthropology--is an optional reading. Additional optional readings include monographs that describe the cultures depicted in the films shown in class.

First, I will discuss the required readings in relation to the course, and then the themes. One theme, that of the anthropology of law, will be demonstrated in more detail.

In addition to the readings assigned, documentary films are shown in conjunction with the feature films as background for the cultures of the nations where the commercial films are made. In particular, "Four Families," which depicts family life in four cultures, is shown because a large proportion of the feature films come from those four areas--India, France, Japan, and North America. Furthermore, when "Four Families" is shown early in the semester, the theme--that the way in which children are reared has some bearing on the adult culture--is a useful introduction to anthropological thought for students at all levels.

The first reading, Ethnography and Cognition, contains a description of personal and contextual signs that one can "read" and interpret in the field. In a similar way, the students can use such signs as a frame of reference in viewing films of the various cultures.

In exercising the students' use of this frame of reference, a short silent feature film is shown, "The Immigrant," which is a 20-minute early Charlie Chaplin production. The film stimulates the students with its humor, some of which is based on the visual impact of the interaction of various types of people--the materialism of a big, burly waiter in an American restaurant, in contrast to and counterpoint with the artist who invites the two immigrants to pose for him, for example.

Questions are asked of this material in relation to signs--for example, "How does Chaplin convey that he is an immigrant?" Some answers include a reference to his hat, worn in a restaurant--that scene was vivid because of an interchange in which the aforementioned American waiter was pulling it off while Chaplin kept putting it back on.

The Agar reference is particularly useful, because it provides a structure for viewing signs--verbal and nonverbal, personal and contextual, for example. The film is useful because, in omitting any verbal cues, the student is able to see how much information can be gleaned about a culture even if one does not yet understand the language spoken.

The Aberle reading, on "Prerequisites," is introduced in conjunction with the film, "Four Families." Such prerequisites as assignment of roles, communication, regulation of affective expression, relationship to the environment, the enculturation of the children, and the effective control of disruptive forms of behavior, are compared across the cultures shown. The use of signs are again brought in, for example, in discussions of differences in dress and in emotional expression within and between cultures.

Supplementary optional readings include the description of cultural prerequisites in the Hoebel and Frost work. The Mead and Wolfenstein articles

are a useful supplement in that they describe child rearing in cultures shown in "Four Families" and thus provide additional bases for comparison.

THE THEMES

After the first introductory section, the students are oriented to the anthropology of the course. Then, a number of films are shown with basically two types of thematic organization in their presentation. The first organization is ethnographic: Feature films are shown in conjunction with documentary films about the same culture. For example, in addition to "Four Families," films made in those respective countries are shown. They may include, for Japan, "Rashomon," and the documentary "Five Faces of Tokyo"; for India, a film in "The Apu Trilogy"--the second in that series, "Aparajito" is particularly effective for depicting cultural change and urbanization as well as acculturation to city life--; for France, "La Grande Illusion," and for America, "Meet John Doe" and/or "Citizen Kane."

Eskimo culture is also shown. The documentary shown is "Nanook of the North." Two relevant commercial films are "The White Dawn," based on the true story of an encounter between American whaling crewmen and Eskimos, and "The Wedding of Palo," an early film made by the Eskimo-Danish explorer Rasmussen.

A second type of theme is topical-theoretical. For example, the ethnographic film, "Were Ni," is shown not simply for the ethnography of Nigeria as for the demonstration of how the concept of madness or deviance is dealt with in an African culture. In different semesters, contrasting American films were shown, including "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" and "I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang." "The Snake Pit" has been recommended to me, and it would also be appropriate for that theme. Readings on cultural

models of "madness" and on institutions include Goffman's Asylums, in particular his descriptions of the medical model and of "total institutions."

A section on values and value orientations is included, based on Hoebel's postulational approach and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Variation in Value Orientations. Value orientations are particularly visible in "Meet John Doe." In addition, the postulates of the Eskimos, as described in Hoebel's The Law of Primitive Man are given to the class in conjunction with those documentary and feature films mentioned above.

Other themes that are explored include cross-cultural universals; situations where various cultures meet; kinship and social organization; the "personal equation" of the anthropological fieldworker; and different extents of acculturation. Also, the anthropology of law is a recurrent theme.

The anthropology of law is first linked with the prerequisites, presented earlier, of maintaining order or of controlling disruptive forms of behavior. Thus, it is established that every culture has a mechanism for settling trouble-cases.

The idea of substantive and of procedural law is presented. Hoebel's jural postulates, particularly for the Eskimo are discussed, as an example of the substantive aspect. Then, Hoebel's discussion of procedures and their relation to other aspects of culture is brought in. Thus, for example, an Eskimo song duel is related to the subsistence pattern and the socioeconomic aspects of culture.

With this background, students viewed the film, "The Wedding of Palo," mentioned above, as it contains a dramatized song contest. That song duel is of interest in its form as well as its content. In addition, in the unfolding story, students are able to link some aspects of the film story

with Eskimo postulates, for example, the Eskimo beliefs regarding supernatural sanction.

Many students were interested to see that the hunting-and-gathering Eskimos had a patterned and sanctioned way of maintaining orderly relationships and of processing conflicts. In that film, two men were contending for the hand in marriage of a girl, and they challenged each other to a song duel. One of them was winning as he elicited the most laughs from the assembled audience, which consisted of the entire village. The young man who was losing wounds Palo with a knife and captures the girl. In the ensuing occurrences, which include a chase on an icy ocean, the recovered Palo prevails. Students are quick to observe linkages between several jural postulates, to be given later, and the contents of that story.

In that same semester, another kind of justice was seen, by way of comparison and contrast, in "The Ox-Bow Incident." Here, in the early American West, a group of vigilantes take justice into their own hands and lynch a group of suspected cattle rustlers. Later, it was discovered that the suspects were innocent.

The book of Clark, The Ox-Bow Incident, was read in conjunction with this course. Many of the narratives in that work, also quoted in the film, describe the nature of law and justice. Questions are raised as to how and in what setting this situation occurred, and it is compared and contrasted to due process of law. It is observed that at the end, the vigilantes, even though they were not compelled to do so, made a collection among themselves to compensate the families of the victims. The question of assignment of responsibility and liability in different cultures is raised here.

When "Citizen Kane" was shown in the same semester, students observed the way in which an individual manipulated the political and legal situation around him. Questions of power in relation to law were raised here.

The film, "Rashomon," was originally shown because it depicted in a poetic way the situation of the anthropologists: When a number of anthropologists study one culture, they may provide different accounts and depictions of the same people, thus raising the question of which one is right. In the same way, in Rashomon, four persons tell their own version of the same incident, a murder in a park, in medieval Japan. Matters of fact and intent are left ambiguous and unresolved as each participant and/or observer tells his or her version of the occurrence. At the end, no one is deemed entirely guilty or innocent, and a priest who was listening to all the accounts demonstrates and expresses his own human fallibility.

Usually, students bring up matters of evidence and how it is corroborated and evaluated. They are interested that the murderer freely confesses and that all views on motives and nuances are expressed. Students are also interested in the procedure itself, in which no lawyers are used while each individual tells his or her entire story.

Another facet of this film is the way in which it shows the relationship of the people to nature and the supernatural and how this, too, affects procedures. In determining the entire story, a medium is summoned, who is used as an instrument for speaking the narrative of the murdered person.

In exploring various aspects of court systems, the film, "Invisible Walls," has proved useful for showing the "silent language" of spatial relationships or proxemics. It is known, in legal anthropology, that people in the same courtroom situation do not necessarily speak the same "language," even if they

are nationals of the same country. In addition, little nonverbal signs are communicated between people that are related to culture and that are not usually conscious. For example, members of one subculture may be comfortable within a few inches of one another in normal conversation, while the standard Anglo-American "space bubble" between strangers is 18 inches. The film, based on the studies of the linguist Edward T. Hall, shows what happens when interviewers enter the "space bubble" of interviewees, and how the latter may back away or exhibit other behavior towards the interviewers. In the classroom discussion, cross-cultural comparisons are made with regard to impressions people make, unwittingly, with differential understandings about distances between people. Such behavior, based on culturally conditioned expectation, can have effects on judgments and evaluations of persons and what they say.

CONCLUSION

Thus, with the use of the film medium, both documentary and feature, aspects of culturally patterned behavior can be brought to light. Once the students are sensitized to such topics as signs, prerequisites, and cross-cultural concepts, they are ready to spot such relationships in the films that are viewed.

Students in a wide variety of fields have expressed how the course has increased their understanding of culture and, furthermore, how it has added another dimension to their viewing of films.

In the discussions, the range of backgrounds and experiences of the students enrich the knowledge of all present. For example, while a film such as "Rashomon" has artistic value, for example, in the way a rainstorm and its clearing is used to dramatize the point at which the story is told

and a sort of resolution reached, such aspects are of incidental interest for the purpose of the course. Usually, some telecommunication and film majors are present, who fill in these details and thus add another dimension while adding to their own depth of comprehension of the film.

Of course, this is not necessarily the only way to teach such a course. As an experiment, I have found that each time I teach it, the content and style are somewhat different. What I have ascertained is that there is a place for the feature film within the anthropology course format.

NOTE

1. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, 1981.

APPENDIX I

Basic prerequisites for a society include:

1. Maintenance of biological functioning - subsistence pattern
2. Reproducing new members - marriage & family
3. Socializing new members into functioning adults - education enculturation
4. Producing and distributing goods and services - economic system, reciprocity, redistribution
5. Maintaining order within the group
6. Defining the "meaning of life" and maintaining motivation to survive and engage in necessary activity - religious system.

APPENDIX II

Film: "The Wedding of Palo"

This film was made in 1935. It was made by the explorer Rasmussen, who is half Eskimo, with an Eskimo cast. We see in it many aspects of Eskimo culture, including their famous song duel - The Eskimo type of justice.

Until very recently, 20,000 or so Eskimos are thinly spread in Arctic isolation across northern North America and Greenland. Settlements are far apart. The population density was 65-200 square miles per person.

Although there are no large kin groups, people live in small groups, with intimate face-to-face relationships. Winter houses contain many families that may or may not be related. Groups are defined by locality, called -- miut.

The Eskimo are good hunters. They subsist mostly on large sea mammals. The culture is more or less uniform, as is the language. Rasmussen spoke one dialect - of Greenland - and could communicate with all the Eskimos he met.

There are regional variations. For example, in western Alaska there may be influences from the Northwest Coast of North America and possibly also from Northeast Asia. Their tales and behavior are clues to basic premises, which are called postulates. Here they are, as described in E. A. Hoebel's The Law of Primitive Man.

- I. Spirit beings, and all animals by virtue of possessing souls, have emotional intelligence similar to that of man.
Corollary: Certain acts are pleasing to them; others arouse their ire.
- II. Man in important aspects of life is subordinate to the wills of animal souls and spirit beings.
Corollary: When displeased or angered by human acts they withhold desired things or set loose evil forces.
- III. Life is hard and the margin of safety small.
Corollary: Unproductive members of society cannot be supported.
- IV. All natural resources are free or common goods.
- V. It is necessary to keep all instruments of production (hunting equipment, etc.) in effective use as much of the time as is possible.
Corollary 1. Private property is subject to use claims by others than its owners.
Corollary 2. No man may own more capital goods than he can himself utilize.

VI. The self must find its realization through action.

Corollary 1. The individual must be left free to act with a minimum of formal direction from others.

Corollary 2. The measure of the self for males is success as a food-getter and in competition for women.

Corollary 3. Those who are no longer capable of action are not worthy of living.

Corollary 4. Creation or personal use of a material object results in a special status with respect to "ownership" of the object.

VII. Women are socially inferior to men but essential in economic production and childbearing.

VIII. The bilateral small family is the basic social and economic unit and is autonomous in the direction of its activities.

IX. For the safety of the person and the local group, individual behavior must be predictable.

Corollary: aggressive behavior must be kept within defined channels and limited within certain bounds.

The Eskimos have many supernatural sanctions and few legal rules. Magic and religion, rather than law, direct most of their actions. Violations are considered sin and can result in illness.

The song duel takes the place of trials. It is an arena for all kinds of disputes and disagreement. Is this justice?

According to Hoebel, the litigants or contestants seek restoration of psychological balance and attainment of psychological satisfaction. It is a society without government, courts, constables, or written law, and contests--duels or in song--are one way in which it maintains its equilibrium.